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SUBJECT: PRT/FARAH: SEXUAL POLITICS OVERSHADOW AS
PROVINCIAL COUNCILORS SWORN IN

11. (SBU) Summary: Five men and three women were sworn in as Provincial Councilors in Farah Province November 10. Gender division was overcome with the decision to elect a woman to the Vice Chairperson position. Aside from a momentary gaffe from Governor Wasefi as he tried to make the selections himself, the Councils leadership selection went smoothly. End Summary.

The Swearing In

12. (SBU) Amidst sprays of plastic flowers and the strains of the national anthem played on a hand-held cassette player, eight of nine Provincial Council members were proudly sworn in November 10 in Farah Province. After verses from the Koran were sung by a local mullah, three women and five men swore the oath of office at the Governors compound. Governor Wasefi, pistol at his side, orated the introduction including calls for righteousness and refraining from poppy cultivation. President Karzais message lauding the return to democracy and the wish for positive relations between governed and governors was well received. JEMB, UNAMA and media representatives were present; however, ranking government officials and family members were noticeably lacking in this well publicized event.

13. (SBU) Notably absent was the Council member elected by the district of Purchaman in northern Farah Province, a two-day journey from Farah City. He did not participate in the November 12 election of the Meshrano Jerga and has not been seen in the city since his election.

Politicians Speak

14. (SBU) Gholam Farooq Khan Farah, of Bala Baluk District, spoke of his loyalty to the people he will to represent and to the government of Afghanistan. He promised to build a positive coalition within the governing body to effect progress for his constituents. Nafasgul Kiedmat, one of the three female Council members, spoke of the need for the group to choose honest, educated people to lead. She called for actors, not speakers, and outlined her platform of security, womens rights, and outlined her platform of security, womens rights, calling for steps to be taken against warlords and corruption.

The Governors Gaffe

15. (SBU) After these speeches, the Governor tried to dismiss the proceedings, saying that the group had no further business for the day. He was quickly reminded by the PRT Poloff that the Council had yet to decide upon their chairperson, vice chairperson or secretary. Governor Wasefi announced that he would choose the chairperson who would, in turn, choose the other officials. Poloff gently explained that idea was contrary to JEMB dictates and the National Provisional Election Officer (NPEO) could outline the official selection process, to which the governor deferred.

Sexual Politics

16. (SBU) After the NEPOs explanation, members retreated to an adjoining room to confer and vote. A source inside the group divulged that they were initially divided along gender lines, but quickly developed the art of coalition building. The final section was made after more than an hour of discussions: Chairperson: Haji Abdul Basir from Khutmeliq, Farah District. Vice Chairperson: Balquis Roshan, (female) Farah City, Farah District. Secretary:

Ziaudin (individual has no other name), Shewan City, Bala Boluk District.

Progress

17. (SBU) Comment: Governor Wasefi made great progress in his acceptance of the Provincial Council since Poloff began meeting regularly with him in early October. As late as November 1, when Poloff asked Wasefi when he expected to host the Provincial Council meeting, he replied, I don't know and I don't care. He has demonstrated a propensity to collect power by marginalizing groups he sees as threatening, problematic, or difficult to control. A recent example was his pointed lack of inclusion of mullahs at a counter-narcotics shura Nov 2. His hard-line stances appear to be softening, however; at more recent CN shuras on November 29 and December 15, mullahs were included and invited to speak.

18. (SBU) Comment continued: The sexual division in the voting for council leadership positions was not unexpected in a society still used to treating women as second-class citizens. Governor Wasefi remarked to the female PRT PRT Poloff during a break that the men carry women on their shoulders, implying that women were incapable of holding power by themselves. The fact that the men relinquished even one of the leadership positions was a positive step towards working together.

19. (SBU) Comment continued: Gender politics continues to be an undercurrent in Farah politics. Subsequent meetings with the three female officials during November and December were heavy with anti-male comments demonstrating their continued bullying. Poloff counseled the women to focus on ideas rather than gender. Male council member Dadiki met reluctantly Nov 28 with Poloff shielding his face with his hand so as not to acknowledge her, directing his attention only to the male interpreter. After an hour of discussion he allowed the hand to drop and two hours later he made eye-contact and spoke directly with Poloff. Change will come to Farah, if slowly. End Comment.

NEUMANN